



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 12, 2016

DCNR Honors Exemplary Volunteer Service at State Parks in Blair, Venango Counties

Harrisburg, PA - A Blair County resident dedicated to making Canoe Creek State Park a showplace of safe, enjoyable trails, and a Venango County-based group initiating innovative and widely popular events at Oil Creek State Park have been named recipients of annual Conservation Volunteer Awards by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

James J. Fitch, a virtual fixture of volunteerism at Canoe Creek State Park in Blair County, was awarded the Bureau of State Parks' 2015 Individual Volunteer Award, and Friends of Oil Creek State Park, volunteers marking their 10th year of service at the Venango County park, were honored with a Group Volunteer Award. Both awards were presented late last month at the bureau's annual meeting in State College.

"James Fitch has emerged as an iconic volunteer at Canoe Creek with trail work that supports the mission of the Bureau of State Parks while establishing great community relations," said DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn. "As a group, Friends of Oil Creek State Park have distinguished themselves in event planning, fund raising, obtaining park supplies and equipment, and so much more."

Timed to mark National Volunteer Week, April 10-16, Dunn's announcement today is designed to "acknowledge the invaluable role of volunteers at our 121 state parks and on our more than 2.2 million acres of state forestland.

"When we tabulate reports from our parks and 20 state forest districts, we see state park volunteer hours totaled 160,019, and forestry hours approached 7,780. The savings – and service – to our park managers and foresters is tremendous."

Besides overseeing maintenance of all trails in the park, Fitch also plans, designs, and oversees various community work projects. His planning and supervision has, over the last few years, improved the quality and safety of the trail system immensely, park officials say.

Under Fitch's supervision, water bars, stairs and boardwalks have been installed. He designed and marked a number of trail re-routes, saving staff many hours of work. New routed wooden directional signage was installed at all trail heads and intersections, replacing posts and signs that often were faded and unreadable.

In 2015, Friends of Oil Creek State Park celebrated their 10th year, marking a span that brought to the park innovative and highly successful events, including a first-ever Winterfest; the Oil

Creek 100 Ultra Run; and “Chicks N’ the Sticks”, an event designed to introduce women to a wide variety of outdoor skills and activities.

In addition to planning and hosting events in the park, the friends group also purchases equipment and supplies for the park and its various volunteer groups. The group’s greatest accomplishment to date has been securing nearly \$60,000 in grant funding in 2015 for new park playground equipment.

Individuals, as well as groups, can volunteer for various state park and forest projects throughout the state. Conservation Volunteers are paired with projects that match their skills and interests.

If interested in becoming a Conservation Volunteer, contact any state park or forest district office, or visit DCNR's website: www.dcnr.pa.gov.

MEDIA CONTACT: Terry Brady, 717-772-9101

#